

Sports of The Times

By JOHN DREBINGER

Baseball Expands

AFTER wasting a deal of time traveling a circuitous route, stumbling over detours and bumping heads in futile recriminations, major league baseball finally seems to have arrived at a happy solution of its expansion problems. Our present two major leagues will now become ten-club circuits, New York will be back in the National League and everybody seems quite happy.

True, this all could have been brought about some time ago with considerably less travail. But then, as Commissioner Ford C. Frick said yesterday, "It's probably better this way. You know, when you try to black-jack folks into doing what you know is good for them, you win no thanks for yourself. Let them find out the hard way and they are all satisfied."

Needless to say, the commissioner is highly pleased with the turn developments have taken. He had recommended more than five years ago that the majors had better lend a serious eye to expansion by taking in the more prosperous minor league cities. However, to gain his end, he had to play a shrewd, cool hand.

A Delicate Spot

He was, for a time, in a tough spot. On one side he was badgered by Congressmen who wouldn't know a foul tip from a filibuster, yet insisted baseball was conducting a hideous monopoly. Then there was the Continental League, a brilliant dream but founded largely on a silvery cloud. Frick knew the time wasn't yet ripe for a third major league, but he had to play it square and let its pioneers find out for themselves.

The Continental League was unsound because, as one might put it, it tried to clear too many barrels on the first hop. Major league status cannot be conferred upon a city on the mere say-so of a small group of men. Such developments must come from within, as happened in Milwaukee, Baltimore, Kansas City, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

To walk into a city like Atlanta and say, "Build yourself a stadium and you'll have major league baseball," can bring only one response. Great, but who builds the stadium and pays the freight?

Still, let no one scoff at the hardy Continentals. But for the rumpus they stirred up, the two majors would still be sleeping quietly on their present sixteen franchises.

Third League Inevitable

Also, as Frick frequently has pointed out, an eventual third league must come. "I am certain that within a few years," says Ford, "four more sites will be ready and, by relocating two from each of the present two leagues, a third could be formed."

Right now, though, there is still a tremendous lot of work to be done, according to Frick, who also knows his club owners. He has no intention of letting them slip back into their former smug complacency, now



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Ford C. Frick

He plays another cool hand

that the Continentals are safely out of their hair.

"Our next big step will be the naming of the four cities to be taken in," says Frick.

For obvious reasons, he can't name the four he now has in mind. But it can be taken for granted that, in addition to New York, two will be Houston and Minneapolis.

The fourth, however, suddenly has become a question mark. Toronto looked to have it all wrapped up. But Jack Cooke now seems to have run into trouble getting that new stadium, and without the stadium, Toronto would have to be bypassed. That would open the door for Dallas-Fort Worth, with Buffalo also screaming for entry. This, at least, assures healthy competition.

L. A. Loses Out

Los Angeles, by reason of the snarl-up in the Chavez Ravine situation, seems out of it, much as Walter O'Malley would welcome an American League entry to share the expense and much as the American League would be willing to oblige.

"Another important item ahead," says Frick, "is finding out what New York intends to do about that Flushing Meadows stadium. I'm still not too sure that's ever going to be built," adds Ford, who also knows his politicians. Fully aware of what's been happening in Los Angeles, he, as well as many other baseball men, are not at all certain that something of the sort might not tangle the matter here.

With the local National League entry temporarily moving into the Yankee Stadium, which seems to be the present plan, one can almost see our city fathers rubbing their hands in glee and saying, "Well now, isn't this ducky? Why waste all that money building a new stadium?"

It would, of course, be horribly shortsighted, since it would ignore entirely the tremendously fertile field Long Island and Brooklyn offer to a venture of this sort. But who ever saw a politician who looked beyond next November's election?

Arthur Daley, who regularly writes Sports of The Times, is on vacation.